

RESOLUTION NO. 12-754

WHEREAS, the City Council and Mayor of the City of Huntsville, Alabama, are apprised that Reverend Ezekiel Bell, age 77, passed on September 9, 2012. A Memorial Service will be held at 6:00 p.m. on September 16, 2012 at the Fellowship Presbyterian Church, Reverend Gregory J. Bentley, Pastor, located at 3406 Meridian Street, Huntsville, Alabama; and,

WHEREAS, Reverend Ezekiel Bell's tenure (1959-1966), remains a period of "New Church Development" in the history of the Fellowship Presbyterian Church. A local committee, chaired by Dr. Harry B. Wade, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in downtown Huntsville, selected, purchased and donated a church manse at 101 Whitney Avenue where Reverend Bell and his family lived until he relocated to assume other pastoral duties. His energy, resourcefulness, and leadership were immediately visible. He began canvassing Edmonton Heights and the Huntsville community near Alabama A&M College and Councill Training School to garner interest in the new church and its programs. He met Mr. Edwin Hill, a resident of Edmonton Heights, who then began introducing him as they traversed the community which consisted of approximately 15 to 20 families. Reverend Bell explained his mission which was to organize a church to serve the present age; and,

WHEREAS, one of the first families Reverend Bell met was the Crawford family, who became one of the early, hardworking church families. Mr. James Crawford was first acting superintendent at the first Sunday school held on Sunday, November 8, 1959, and his three sisters Ethel, Geneva and Bernice were choir members. The first worship service in the Fellowship House occurred, aptly, on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1959. The first worship service in the new church was held on the fourth Sunday in August 1960. Reverend Bell entitled his first sermon "Upon this Rock." According to early members Edwin Hill and Marjorie Booker-Ramsey, the first Sunday school and Worship church services were held in the pastor's living room at the manse at 101 Whitney Avenue. Edwin and Reeves Hill, Belle and Norman Fletcher, Mattie and Jonathan Ford, Ella and Samuel Sanders, Pearl Moore and children, Reverend and Mrs. Sam Crawford, Tommie and W.H. Bradford, and Geraldine and William Booker were among the first families uniting to form a new church; and,

WHEREAS, Reverend Ezekiel "Zeke" Bell, graduate of the University Of Chicago School Of Theology, was selected by the Home Missions Committee of the Presbytery of North Alabama to organize a new church in Huntsville, Alabama. He was affectionately called Zeke and became the pastor of Fellowship Presbyterian Church on September 21, 1959, although there was no church building. He provided exceptionally leadership and was a committed minister of the Gospel. He was a dedicated pastor and church leader in the Huntsville, Alabama and Memphis communities and was a shining example for church leadership across the United States by his acceptance of all, regardless of sex, class, or race; and,

WHEREAS, Reverend Bell began his courageous civil rights activism in 1959, when he moved to Huntsville, Alabama, intent on fulfilling a promise he had made as a student at the University of Chicago Seminary School. Reverend Bell, along with two of his classmates, made a pact that they would change the world in the next five years; Reverend Bell fulfilled his promise, as he is counted among the local leaders and civil rights activists who changed conditions for blacks in Huntsville, integrating the city's parks, lunch counters, and public schools. During the pinnacle of this movement, the activists invited Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., to speak at Oakwood College on March 19, 1962. Reverend King gave his renowned "I Have a Dream" speech at the Oakwood Gym, almost a year-and-a-half before his famous speech at the March on Washington; and,

WHEREAS, some of his major contributions include: served as Chairman of Huntsville's first civil rights organization, the Community Service Committee; arranged Martin Luther King, Jr.'s historic visit and opened up his home to Reverend King, where he stayed for the duration of his visit; his home was the site of several civil rights strategy sessions; he was one of the principal civil rights leaders in Huntsville and credited with almost single-handedly mobilizing the community; assisted in the founding the Fellowship Presbyterian Church; he became the pastor of Parkway Gardens Presbyterian Church in 1966; he continued his tireless pursuit of equal rights and opportunities for all in Memphis, where he became actively involved in the 1968 sanitation workers' strike; showcased his ardent support and championing of fairness and equality in the workplace by becoming the first African-American minister to march with the sanitation workers; served as President of the Memphis Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; in 2007, and contributed his expertise as a member of a panel discussion on racial and social injustice at the first Southern Faith, Labor, and Community Alliance Conference; and,

WHEREAS, Reverend Ezekiel Bell was well liked and respected by his associates and fellow ministers. He possessed exceptional loyalty and integrity and he will be remembered and missed by all who knew him.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council and Mayor of the City of Huntsville, Alabama, on behalf of its citizens and the Fellowship Presbyterian Church congregation that the life and public service of Reverend Ezekiel Bell is hereby commemorated, and sincere heartfelt sympathy is hereby expressed to his wife, Eltie Bell and their two sons, other family members and many friends with respect to his passing.

ADOPTED this the 13th day of September, 2012

President of the City Council
of the City of Huntsville, Alabama

APPROVED this the 13th day of September, 2012.

Mayor of the City of Huntsville,
Alabama